

Husbands Help With Shopping, Mate Rejects Outstanding Effort

By Monte Noelke

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MERTZON — The late 1969 holiday in the Short Grass Country progressed on the same schedule as in previous years. Parties took up the evenings. Daylight hours were spent either in herding kids to the doctor or gathering presents. Newspaper accounts claimed retail sale were down however, the crowds on the passageways to and from the stores gave no indication that the usual shopping spree lacked full force.

More bargains were available for shoppers in the season just past. Five-dollar items could purchased readily at \$18.95 to \$25. Most of the trinket line — cap pistols, toy cars, etc. — failed to rise above the \$5 level. Small token gifts could be bargained for at near the \$50 range. Businessmen found that by using quantity discounts they could distribute their usual handouts at about 33 percent of their gross profit on the year's take.

Inflation was dramatically apparent in women's presents. Aprons and dish towels opened strong in November and failed to weaken during the entire shopping period. Luxury gifts such as biscuit cutters and sink cleaners started and ended in a bullish position. Egg beaters and potato mashers were flat out of reason. I doubt if any husband in the Shortgrass community was able to buy his wife a present without knocking the velvet out of a dollar bill.

For the first time in our married life, I tried to move from the chauffeur and stevedore rank to actually doing some Christmas shopping. In every preceding season, my mate had made such a big production out of whipping things together for our eight children that I decided this time to step in and show her the project was being grossly overdrawn.

I might as well admit that the idea never got far. You see, without consulting her, I made a fantastic buy on some oldcrop raisins to stock the stockings. From then on, we couldn't get any Santa Clausing done for carrying on a big league husband-versus-wife debate.

She didn't care how economical the bulk raisins were, nor how much more nourishing they'd have been than high priced candy and expensive fresh fruit. Instead of dealing in true values, she started that same old line about how she wished she'd listened to her mother and married somebody nice like a nightclub magician, or a singing preacher, or a well-to-do railroad man.

The hissing and lamenting finally got so bad that I had to take all those good raisins out to the ranch to add to the cowboys' Christmas bonuses. Cowhands are as ungrateful as wives, but at least they don't bring their mother's advice into the act when you try to do something beneficial for their health. Judging from the way folks were chousing the eggnog bowls along about that time, a bait of dried currants should have come in for a miraculous save.

Football mascots live a better life than married men during the holidays. Caged bears and hackamored steers go through a hectic existence, being dragged around by wild eyed college hombres; yet they don't have to brave arm-poking crowds every Yule season, or carry loads of packages that would give a pack mule a hernia clear down to his fetlocks.

Never in your life will you see one of those mascots look as frantic as a husband in a department store. As a matter of fact, on the long haul, it would be more merciful if the domesticated male could be wheeled along in a cage, or led on a rope. There's no way for a cheer leader to be as dangerous as a floorwalker.

The whole decade of the '60s was characterized by people throwing money around like they'd never heard of stewed prunes or seedless raisins. Housewives weren't happy unless they were stocking up on imported finery. About the only locally made objects they had their hands on were credit cards and trading stamps. Had my wife paid the slightest attention to me, she could have broken that trend and, on top of that, save a sizable sum of money.

As it was, the kids were never given a chance to be healthy and thrifty at the same time.

Inflation won't ever be stopped as long as the Christmas tradition overrides good judgment. I do know one thing for sure that has been stopped: this is the last time I'll ever try to help my wife out of a shopping jam.